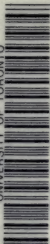


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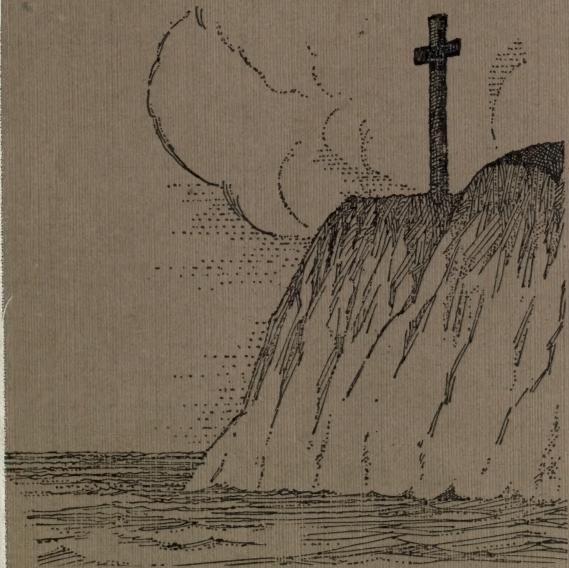
Canada. National Parks Branch  
The Lake Erie cross

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# THE LAKE ERIE CROSS

PORT DOVER, ONTARIO



*A wise nation preserves its records, gathers up its monuments, decorates the tombs of its illustrious dead, repairs its great structures, and fosters national pride and love of country, by perpetual reference to the sacrifices and glories of the past.—Joseph Howe.*

CANADIAN NATIONAL PARKS  
HISTORIC SITES

1922





# The Lake Erie Cross

Erected July, 1922

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## A BRIEF RECORD

OF THE DISCOVERY AND OCCUPATION OF THE NORTH SHORE  
OF LAKE ERIE (1669-1670) BY THE SULPICIAN PRIESTS

*François Dollier de Casson*

and

*René de Bréhant de Galinée*

WHO ON MARCH 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1670, ERECTED A CROSS, AT THE  
FOOT OF WHICH THEY AFFIXED A PROCÈS-  
VERBAL, WITH THE ARMS OF FRANCE,  
THUS TAKING POSSESSION IN THE  
NAME OF THEIR KING.

## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

HON. CHARLES STEWART

Minister

W. W. CORY, C.M.G.

Deputy Minister

J. B. HARKIN

Commissioner Canadian National Parks  
Ottawa



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# The Lakeside Cross

## THE STORY OF THE DOLLIER AND GALINEE EXPEDITION

FOR many years to come the mariners on Lake Erie who find themselves in the vicinity of Port Dover will see, as perhaps the most conspicuous feature of the lakeside landscape, a tall cross on a commanding site at the mouth of the River Lynn. There will be some who will understand its significance. There will be many who will not, visitors and strangers, newcomers from foreign lands who have been attracted to Canada by the hopes of a larger, freer and more prosperous life; children of Canadian homes and schools who have not yet learned that Canada has a history in which are recorded thrilling and romantic stories of great deeds done and noble sacrifices made in order that a new nation might be founded and a new civilization planted on the broad and fertile lands of Canada. It is for the many who do not know the story of the Dollier and Galinée expedition that this brief record of a brave and unselfish enterprise is presented.

### THE STORY IN BRIEF

The substance of it may be put into a brief paragraph so that even he who runs or holds the wheel may read enough to understand at a glance the meaning of the lakeside cross. More than two hundred and fifty years ago the Lake Erie region was one vast forest desolation. Occasional patches of undergrowth marked the sites of abandoned villages and corn fields, mute reminders of a vanished race. The well worn trails, skirting the lakes and lonely streams, or winding along the dividing ridges, were rarely trodden by the foot of man. From western New York, Seneca war parties may from time to time have passed through, on their way to attack their enemies in the far west, at the risk of encountering scalping parties of their foes, roving Andastes or Eries from south of the lake lying in wait to attack them. On the shores of Lake Superior and Lake Michigan, a few wretched survivors of the former inhabitants of Southern Ontario still trembled at the name of their relentless and dreaded foe. Only the wild creatures of the wood, the bear, deer, turkey, raccoon, beaver, remained. The forest teemed with game. Seneca



hunting bands threaded the forest trails in winter in pursuit of beaver. Southern Ontario had become, in name as well as in fact, the beaver hunting ground of the Iroquois.

Such was the condition of the Lake Erie region when in 1669 two French priests named Dollier and Galinée set out from Montreal in a fleet of seven canoes containing twenty-one men and two canoes of Seneca guides with the object of carrying the message of the Christian religion to the savage tribes of the far southwest. Proceeding by way of the St. Lawrence, Lake Ontario and the Grand River, after a journey of three months, during which they suffered great hardships and privation, they came upon Lake Erie. They were enraptured with the country and described it as an earthly paradise. They erected a cross on the lakeside bearing the Arms of France and an inscription declaring that this unoccupied land was claimed by right of discovery for the King of France. They were the first Europeans to visit the Long Point region, and the first to sojourn on the shore of Lake Erie, so far as is known. For the winter they chose as a camping place a sheltered spot back from the lake, where they built a cabin and storehouse.

Through the researches of the Norfolk Historical Society this wintering place has been identified. Close to Black Creek, above the forks of the River Lynn or Patterson's Creek, at Port Dover, relics of the building erected by the priests still exist. Galinée wrote an interesting narrative of the journey—accompanied by a map—which has been translated into English by Dr. James H. Coyne, of St. Thomas. The present cross has been erected by the Canadian National Parks Branch of the Dominion Government as a permanent memorial of the brave and intrepid missionaries and as a reminder to the present and coming generations of the Canadian people that their history is as rich in interest and romance as that of the older nations of the world.

### THE MISSION TO THE INDIANS

The story thus hurriedly sketched, we may now proceed with more leisurely steps to follow the movements of the priests from the inception of their missionary project to its rather disastrous termination.

In his introduction to the Galinée narrative Dr. Coyne has focussed very clearly the colonial policy in which the Dollier mission was embedded. Spain was reaping golden harvests from her colonial possessions. New France was to be similarly explored and developed



for the benefit of the mother country. To the church was conceded the privilege of preaching the gospel to the heathen and to this concession Jesuit, Sulpician and Recollet responded—not without a certain amount of rivalry as the early documents show. In 1669 the colonial programme included the exploration of the copper mine of Lake Superior, intended as an offset to the possession by Spain of her rich mines in Mexico and Peru. Rumours of the great rivers had taken definite shape and it was desirable that these unknown waterways should be explored. By them the route to the South Sea was to be discovered. The English and Spaniards were to be confined to a narrow strip on the Atlantic coast and the rest of North America was to become a French preserve. The Nipissing trade route from Lake Superior was considered laborious and costly, and a new way was to be opened to Montreal.

In the year 1669 Francis Dollier de Casson, a Sulpician priest of the seminary of Montreal, spent a winter in the woods with a Nipissing chief in order to learn the Algonquin language. He had long desired to go out among the Indian tribes of the west as a missionary of the gospel. The Indian chief had a slave who had lived in the west and who offered to act as guide. Dollier, at the suggestion of Abbé de Queylus, the Superior of the seminary at Montreal, accepted the services of the Indian and made arrangements to undertake the journey. He was then only thirty-three years of age and was in the prime of physical manhood. Before entering the church he had distinguished himself as a cavalry captain under the great Marshal Turenne. It was said he was so strong that he could carry two men sitting on his hands, yet he was a man of gentle birth and courtly and engaging manners.

René de Bréhant de Galinée had similar family traditions. He had also received a mathematical training, knew something of map-making, and had studied the Algonquin language. He applied to the Superior for leave to accompany the expedition and this was readily granted.

We have then two ardent Breton missionaries of gentle birth and fine education, robust of body and mind, ready to meet all dangers and privations in exploring the unknown forests of the west in order to carry to western tribes of savages the banner of the Cross.

#### LA SALLE JOINS THE EXPEDITION

In the ambition of the priests Governor Courcelles and Intendant Talon saw an opportunity to extend the dominion of New France and to exploit new sources of wealth. At Montreal was a young

man of twenty-six years named La Salle, who had felt thus early the call of the west and was anxious to undertake a journey of exploration pure and simple. He had been connected with the order of the Jesuits in France but had left the priesthood for a secular career. Two years ago he had come to New France. He had obtained a grant of a seigniory at Lachine from the seminary of Montreal, and had begun the erection of a fortified village. The situation was favourable for the fur trade and La Salle began to build up a fortune. The stories, however, of the great rivers of the west, the Mississippi and the Ohio, touched his imagination and he became dissatisfied with the rôle of a mere trader. He decided to sell his property and to go out to discover the great river Ohio and to trace its supposed outlet in the Vermilion Sea or the Gulf of California, where it was believed the riches of China and Japan could be tapped. Governor Courcelles suggested to Dollier and La Salle that they should join forces and combine the interests of church and state. The suggestion was accepted and arrangements were made for the journey. Thus the united mission had the approval of secular and ecclesiastical authorities, of Governor Courcelles, Intendant Talon and of Abbé de Queylus.

#### DR. COYNE'S SYNOPSIS

Following closely Dr. Coyne's synopsis of the narrative we learn that the adventurers, with the exception of La Salle, who was delayed for a few days, left Montreal on the 6th of July in seven birch-bark canoes with twenty-one men, as stated, including a surgeon, a Dutchman as Iroquois interpreter, besides two canoes of Senecas, who were to conduct the party. The canoes were twenty feet in length and two or three in width. Each was capable of carrying four men and between eight and nine hundred pounds of baggage, whilst one man could easily carry it over a portage. A good birch canoe would last five or six years, whilst the Iroquois vessels, made of elm bark, were good only for a month or thereabouts.

They shot in descending, or dragged their canoes through in ascending, the less difficult rapids, and carried them around the others. They camped on the bare ground, and lived on Indian fare—corn-meal porridge seasoned with catfish, varied as chance offered by a diet of venison or moose. The Indians were everywhere hospitable, except when crazed with drink. The brandy trade with the Albany Dutch is incidentally mentioned. Pow-wows were held in regular form, and the Iroquois hospitality, domestic economy and tribal ceremonies are described. The Frenchmen were unwilling witnesses to horrible tortures inflicted by savages upon their prisoners,

tortures only equalled by those inflicted about the same time by civilized men in Europe, and in our own time by lawless mobs in the Southern States. They visited Jesuit missions among the Iroquois and at the Sault, and criticise freely, but in courteous and guarded language. Mysterious noises are heard in the forests. It is the tally-ho of King Arthur's huntsmen they hear, and the mystery is solved.

## THE JOURNAL

A rock, rudely painted by the savages with human figures, is regarded by the ecclesiastics as a demon. It is ruthlessly broken up and sunk in the river, and God rewards the daring iconoclasts with an unexpected quarry, which enables them to break a long fast. Galinée shared the beliefs of his race and age; but he had an eye to the practical. A sulphur spring is visited. The productiveness of choice regions is described with enthusiasm. Hunting grounds, like the Burford Plains, the coast opposite Long Point and the Rondeau, are noted down. The writer was evidently a trained and shrewd observer and practised writer. Few journals of travel are more interesting or more instructive. The simplicity and quaintness of seventeenth century French add piquancy and attractiveness to an official report intrinsically valuable. Everything bears the stamp of the cultured Christian, the "gentleman" of the seminary.

## A DELIBERATE JOURNEY

If the expedition was an arduous one, it was certainly deliberate. Thirty-seven days after leaving Montreal they reached the Seneca valley on Boughton Hill, in New York State. Detained there more than a month, they were ten days on the way from Irondequoit Bay to the Beverley swamp. More than three weeks again elapsed before they arrived at Port Dover, where they built a winter cabin and spent more than five months. After leaving the mouth of Patterson's Creek in the spring, they were two months, all but a day, in reaching the Sault Ste. Marie. With the aid of experienced canoemen they made the return journey to Montreal over the well-known Nipissing route in three weeks. Altogether, the journey lasted 347 days.

## THE ROUTE

Making their way up the St. Lawrence, they coasted all along the south shore of Lake Ontario to Burlington Bay. They were the first Europeans on record to enter the Niagara River from Lake



Ontario. They heard the roar of the cataract, but it was more than nine years later before, according to any positive record, La Salle actually saw it. They entered Burlington Bay and visited a little Indian village called Tinawatawa, or Tanawawa, in the great Beverley swamp, near the site of the present village of Westover. The Senecas had formed a small settlement here on account of the extraordinary abundance of game, especially the bear and deer. It was here that a remarkable meeting took place on the 24th September, 1669. Jolliet and Peré had left Montreal before the Sulpicians, under orders from the governor to discover the copper mine on Lake Superior, and to find out an easier route of transporting the ore to Montreal. Jolliet had not had time to visit the mine, but an Iroquois prisoner, whom he had saved from being burned by the Ottawas, had shown him a route to the Iroquois hitherto unknown to the French. It was down the chain of lakes, and Jolliet was the first European to descend them. But his guide became apprehensive, as he approached the Iroquois country, of prowling Andastes. This tribe lived on the upper waters of the Susquehanna, and carried on a constant warfare with the Iroquois, until the latter destroyed their villages. Yielding to the guide's urgency, Jolliet left his canoe, probably near Port Stanley, whence they followed the forest trail to the Grand River, and thence to Tinawatawa, where they met La Salle and the Sulpicians. Jolliet informed the priests that he had sent some of his people to look for a nation called the Pottawattamies, where no missionaries had as yet been. Galinée and Dollier at once became eager to go, by way of this new tribe, to the mission they proposed to establish far down the Ohio, and Jolliet courteously gave them a sketch of the route he had followed and explained where he had left the canoe, which was now at their disposal.

#### LA SALLE LEAVES THE MISSIONARIES

La Salle and the priests were evidently at cross purposes, and he took advantage of the opportunity to leave them. An attack of fever furnished him a reasonable pretext and they parted company. Jolliet and La Salle went eastward. The latter was now free to prosecute the discovery of the Ohio without the impediments of a double leadership. The priests wrote Fénelon, a brother of the great Fénelon, then carrying on a mission at Kenté, on Weller's Bay, in the north-west end of Prince Edward County, asking him to send "black robes" to Tinawatawa. In consequence, Trouvé, who was extending the chain of Sulpician missions along the north shore of Lake Ontario proceeded to the Beverley swamp in November following. Trouvé

assured Galinée that he had heard the noise of Niagara from the neighbourhood of Toronto. Both banks of Lake Ontario had now been explored by members of the Sulpician order, to whom the credit is due of having produced the first authoritative map of this lake.

La Salle went east with four canoes. The two priests proceeded to the Grand River with three. The canoes would only carry two men each besides the baggage, and there were twelve men in the party, the same number as in La Salle's. It was important that Jolliet's canoe should be secured before it was discovered by the Indians. Accordingly the Dutchman, who had come with them as interpreter from Montreal, accompanied by two Shawnees, set out on foot with



FORKS OF RIVER LYNN AND BLACK CREEK, PORT DOVER

The wintering place was a few hundred yards up Black Creek to the right, and about one hundred yards therefrom

provisions and ammunition, to follow the forest trails to the place of the canoe. There they were to await the arrival of the rest of the party. The fate of the three men is unknown. They were never heard of afterward. Galinée describes the finding of the canoe by other messengers two or three weeks later, and again by the party

during the following April. There is some ground for the surmise that the missing men deserted to La Salle.

The priests and the remaining seven men descended the Grand River, six in the canoes or dragging them through the shoal water, the others following the trail along the bank. Lake Erie seemed to them like a great sea. The wind was strong from the south. There was perhaps no lake in all the country whose billows rose so high as Lake Erie, because, as Galinée naively suggests, of its great depth and its great extent.

### WINTERING ON LAKE ERIE

They wintered just above the forks where Black Creek joins the River Lynn, otherwise known as Patterson's Creek, at Port Dover. The exact spot was identified in August, 1900, at a meeting of the Norfolk Historical Society. Slight elevations indicate the outlines of the building. Trenches for drainage are quite distinct. A slight depression in an embankment shows where the door stood, near the little rivulet where they got their water.

### INDIAN VISITORS

Iroquois hunters visited them during the winter and admired the structure, which was dwelling-house, chapel, granary and fortification all in one. They stored their granary with some fifty bushels of walnuts and chestnuts, besides apples, plums, grapes and hackberries. They made wine of the grapes. It was as good as *vin de Grave*, and was used for mass. The rivers were full of fish and of beaver. Deer roamed the meadows in herds of a hundred. Bears were abundant, fatter and of better flavor than the most savory pigs of France. No wonder that the worthy priests are enthusiastic over the country. There is assuredly, they say, no more beautiful country in all Canada. It is the Earthly Paradise of Canada.

Their dwelling-place was a beautiful spot on the bank of a rivulet, five-eighths of a mile inland, sheltered from the wind. They set up a pretty altar at one end of the cabin. There they heard mass three times a week without missing a single time. "You may imagine," says Galinée, "the consolation we experienced in seeing ourselves with our good God, in the depths of the woods, in a land where no European had ever been. Monsieur Dollier often said to us that that winter ought to be worth to us, for our eternal welfare, more than the best ten years of our life."





Wintering Place of Dollier de Casson and de Galinée near Port Dover, Ontario, showing outlines of the buildings, still quite apparent

## THE LAKESIDE CROSS

On Passion Sunday, 23rd March, 1670, they all proceeded to the lake shore to make and plant a cross. At its foot were placed the arms of the King of France, with a formal inscription setting forth how the two Seminary missionaries and seven other Frenchmen had been the first of all Europeans to winter on the lake, and how they had taken possession of it in the name of King Louis XIV, as an unoccupied country, by attaching his arms to the foot of the cross.

Three days later they portaged their canoes and packs to the shore, Black Creek being still frozen over. Then they sailed across to Turkey Point. A strong head-wind prevented them from rounding it. While waiting for the wind to moderate, one of their canoes was caught by it, carried away and lost. Then, with all the baggage in the two remaining canoes, only two men could be carried in each. Five, including the priests, must face the forest trail from Turkey Point. Coming to Big Creek, they walked up-stream along its bank until the Walsingham swamp checked their laborious journey and forced them to follow the stream again to its mouth. Crossing on a raft, in a snow-storm, they landed in mud and slush up to midleg, proceeded to the Long Point portage, and then to the mouth of a stream, probably Kettle Creek, where they found Jolliet's canoe. Then all were able to embark together, to sail to the Rondeau. They had been nearly starved since leaving Port Dover. Now they found a herd of more than two hundred does. They fired and missed. Another herd of twenty or thirty they surrounded and drove into the water. Killing ten of the best, they supplied their empty larder. Next day, having sailed nearly fifty miles, they camped on Point Pelee. A storm rose in the night from the northeast and carried off the packs of one of Dollier's canoes, including the altar service and part of their guns, ammunition and provisions.

## THEY RETURN TO MONTREAL

This disaster put an end to the mission project. All they could do was to make the best of their way to Montreal. To turn back would perhaps be humiliating. Allured by the prospect of seeing unknown regions, they determined to go on to the Sault and descend by the Nipissing route with some fleet of Ottawa canoes.

They ascended the Detroit River, destroying on the way a stone idol held in veneration by the Indians. They knew it had been the cause of all their troubles, and so they took a just revenge upon it. God rewarded them the same day with a deer and a bear.



Memorial Cross, Port Dover, Ontario, erected by the Canadian National Parks in 1922




They found no sign of salt in Sanson's "Lake of the Salt Waters," to which, ten years later, Hennepin and La Salle gave the name of Lake Ste. Claire. They coasted along the east side of Lake Huron and the south side of Manitoulin Island, crossed over to the Mackinac Islands, and then sailed eastward along the north shore to St. Mary's River. At the Sault they found Marquette and Dablon

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Nous icy SoubSignes Certifions avoir ve  
heer Sur les terres du lac, nomme d'erie, Les Armes  
Roy de France au pied d'une croix avec cette inscription  
De salut 1669, clément 9 tant allé dans La chaire de  
Louis 14 regnant en France Monsieur de  
Mallej tant gouverneur de la nouvelle France et Monsieur  
lon, tant intendant pour le Roy sont arrivés avec Lieu  
x missionnaires du Séminaire du montreal accompagnés  
Francois qui les premiers de tout les peuples  
appars ont huyette avec lac. ont ils ont pris possession  
nom de leur Roy, Comme d'une terre non occupée par  
possession de. Les armes qu'ils ont attachés au pied d'az cette croix  
Les de quoy avons signé le présent Certificat  
Francois Dollier, prestre du Diocese de nantes en Bretagne  
De Galinée sieur du diocèse de Chartres en Bretagne.



From a photograph of the original procès-verba obtained from the French Archives

comfortably established in a fortified mission. Their welcome could not have been a very cordial one. After three days they hired a guide to take them to Montreal, where they arrived on the 18th June, after an absence of nearly a year.

It is hardly to be wondered at if they were looked upon as dead men come to life again.

Galinée made a map of the journey for Talon. He explains that he only put down what he actually saw. It was the first map

of the Upper Lakes at first hand. Defective as it is it marks a great advance in the cartography of North America.

Such is the story of the Dollier mission. And now Southern Ontario, beaver hunting-ground of the painted savage when these pious but brave explorers discovered it, is planted with prosperous farms and busy towns and a multitude of churches where, in differing tones and manners it may be, but surely with the same intent, the story that meant so much to Dollier and Galinée is told week by week and year by year, the story of the Cross.









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